A VIEW FROM INSIDE THE SURGE

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PHOTO: SFC Conrad Kaluzny of 1-4 Cavalry with three insurgents in Doura. Both men on the left were eventually detained and the man on the right fled the area. (U.S. Army, C/1-4 CAV Photo)

DURING THE EARLY YEARS of Operation Iraqi Freedom, too many units attempted to fight an emerging and eventually flourishing insurgency the wrong way. They over-emphasized kinetic operations against an adaptive insurgent hidden in a sympathetic or intimidated population. While there are examples of successful counterinsurgency efforts at various levels of command during the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom, those successes have been sporadic and short-lived at best. However, with the implementation of a new strategy in Iraq based on the tenets of FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, our military has proven that it can effectively conduct counterinsurgency operations on a large scale. An increase in troop density at key locations in and around Baghdad, a significant effort to move away from large forward operating bases to combat outposts (to protect the people), and a relentless attack on Al-Qaeda in Iraq were critical to the improved security levels across the country.

David Galula's 1964 treatise *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* served as the primary source behind the development of chapter five of FM 3-24, "Executing Counterinsurgency Operations." The principles Galula emphasizes have stood the test of time in various theaters of operation. Unfortunately, his work has remained largely unknown to front-line Soldiers, some of whom ventured into the Iraq insurgency relying primarily on previous experience and instinct rather than the proven principles discussed by Galula. Writing from first-hand experiences on the counterinsurgency battlefields of the 1940s and 1950s, Galula emphasized the importance of collecting intelligence from the local population to identify and then purge the insurgents from their midst.

As a battalion commander during the surge, I found that our unit had limited effectiveness during our first several weeks on the ground in Baghdad. Almost all of our tactical victories and defeats were kinetic in nature. Over time, however, we pursued a winning strategy centered on the population that resulted in a complete reversal on the ground. Previously unknown to me, I have since found David Galula's book on counterinsurgency warfare to be indispensable as an operational framework. Facing the insurgency in Baghdad, 1-4 Cavalry of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 1st Infantry Division, employed Galula's tactics during the surge of 2007-2008.

		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188

Report Documentation Page

1. REPORT DATE **APR 2009**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-03-2009 to 00-04-2009**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **A View from Inside the Surge**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **U.S. Army Combined Arms Center,Fort Leavenworth,KS,66027**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**8**	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

Background

Serving as the commander of 1-4 CAV during this time, I received the mission to reposition our unit from the Al Hadr, Saha, and Abu T'Shir neighborhoods of East Rashid in southwest Baghdad slightly north to the Doura neighborhood. Al Hadr was a violent neighborhood, but Doura was the most violent and contested neighborhood in the Rashid District. The 2-12 Infantry was fighting valiantly as the 4th IBCT main effort there with three rifle companies, but it would require a greater concentration of troops to defeat the entrenched insurgency led by Al-Qaeda. We were assigned the eastern one-third of the territory, allowing 2-12 Infantry to concentrate in the west part of Doura while 2-23 Stryker assumed control of our former area of operations.

Doura was a perfect breeding ground for the insurgency for several reasons, and a place that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) felt it could and must hold on to. After some analysis, it became clear that our new area of operations was the gateway into Doura from the southern belts of Baghdad. Insurgents regularly met in various locations in the area to

Galula's COIN Strategy
1. **Make contact with the people.**
2. **Protect the population.**
3. **Control the population.**
4. **Collect intelligence.**
5. **Win the support of the population.**
6. **Purge the insurgent.**
7. **Involve the population in the long-term solution.**

plan their activities, and they brought in significant amounts of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other materials for use throughout Doura. This Sunni neighborhood was important to Al-Qaeda because it was readily accessible from the southern belts where AQI remained largely unchallenged (this would change dramatically when follow-on
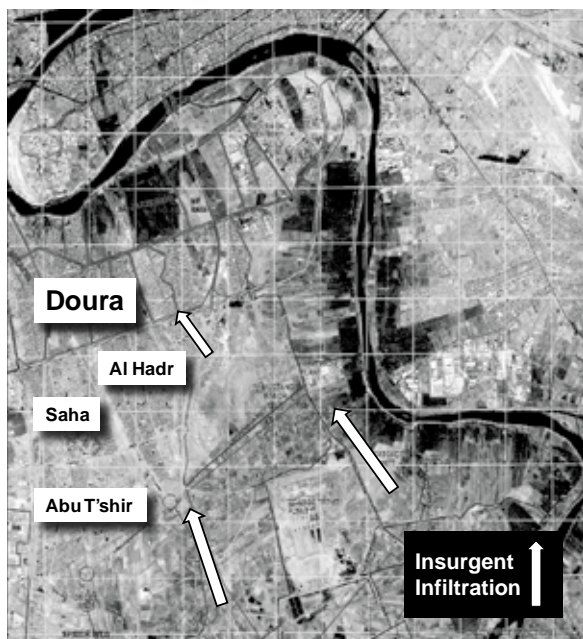
The rural area to the south of Baghdad, largely unoccupied by coalition forces early in 2007, provided Al-Qaeda in Iraq the perfect opportunity to freely gather materials and equipment and plot insurgent strategy for Doura. The surge changed all that.

surge brigades arrived in the coming months), and it offered insurgents passage over the Tigris to the Karadah Peninsula and into the Rusafa District—both Shi'a dominated areas. In addition, it sat astride the main highway into Baghdad from the south and offered AQI the ability to influence the Sadiyah neighborhood in West Rashid where Shi'a militias were working hard to expel long-time Sunni residents. But even more important than the geographic advantages Doura provided was the fact that the Sunni population there was disenfranchised from their central government. They had little sympathy for the U.S. military, which they thought responsible for allowing Doura to disintegrate into chaos.

Strategy

We developed a strategy that I later discovered is aptly described in Chapter 7 of Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. Our first two overlapping steps were to "make contact with and protect the population." As we began to actively patrol, it became clear to us that we were all alone. When we questioned the population, no one could provide us with any useful intelligence and simply said that "outsiders" were responsible for all of the bad activity. Galula describes this exact situation when he states that "the inhabitants will usually avoid any contact with [the counterinsurgent]. There is a barrier that has to be broken."[1] While the insurgents knew who and where we were at all times, we were often completely deceived. We even unknowingly stood right next to them as we interacted with the population. With perfect situational awareness, the insurgents began to attack us relentlessly. Within the first 10 days we saw 15 IEDs, 7 small-arms attacks, 5 indirect fire attacks, and 1 vehicle-borne IED. Three civilians were murdered on the streets and three of our Soldiers were injured, necessitating the medical evacuation of two of them.

Mounting patrols throughout the day and evening was not sufficient to effectively protect either the local population or our own forces. Galula states, "The counterinsurgent cannot achieve much if the population is not, and does not feel, protected from the insurgent."[2] In addition to our combat outpost, I made a decision to maintain two platoons on the streets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.[3] This persistent presence had an immediate, positive effect on security. In the 10 days following this tactic, IED attacks dropped to 4—with 2 of those found prior to detonation—and civilian murders dropped to only 1. This was not a temporary adjustment. We maintained this on-the-ground presence for the next 10 months until we redeployed.

We took other steps to break down the barrier between our forces and the population. Our platoons used their digital cameras to take photos of the military-aged males that they came into contact with and followed up with tactical questioning. "What is your name?" "Where do you live?" "Do you have a job?" "Do you have some identification?" Our Soldiers did the same with shop owners, most of whom could only open up for a few hours each day. After fully realizing the depth of mistrust and hatred between our Sunni residents and the National Police we partnered with, we ceased joint patrols with them and directed them to remain at their checkpoints on the fringes of the neighborhood. Our credibility immediately went up with the people. In their minds, the National Police were Shi'a militiamen in uniform, and our joint patrols served as a means to bring that "militia" to their doorsteps. For their part, the National Police believed that everyone in the neighborhood was a member of AQI, so they readily accepted this temporary arrangement.[4]

To further improve our contact with the population, we developed projects with money from the Commander's Emergency Response Program. The projects made an immediate impact in a variety of ways. Over 44 years ago, Galula wrote: "Starting with tasks directly benefiting the population—such as cleaning the village or repairing the streets—the counterinsurgent leads the inhabitants gradually, if only in a passive way, to participate in the fight against the insurgent."[5] We hired local men to improve the electrical grid with new transformers, electrical transmission wires, and a significant microgeneration project. We cleared sewage lines,

We maintained this on-the-ground presence for the next 10 months until we re-deployed.

repaired sewage pumps, and contracted for a number of trucks to clean standing sewage from the street and empty septic tanks at individual homes. We developed a contract to renovate a dilapidated clinic. Eventually, we put in new sidewalks and streetlights as well. We hired hundreds of men to pick up trash, and this turned out to be our most effective contract.[6] All of the work was done by neighborhood men. This not only infused money into the economy and improved their lives in a tangible way, but provided the population with an alternative to accepting money from AQI for trafficking IED material or reporting on American troop movements. By being on location 24 hours a day, we were able to provide security for the contractors and their work.

During our initial effort to make contact with the people and then throughout our tour, we provided minor medical care when we encountered the injured and sick. We provided blankets, heaters, generators, book bags, and soccer balls to families throughout our area of operations. Eventually, we built parks for children and several soccer fields. These efforts, in addition to contracts to improve the appearance and functionality of the neighborhood, were provided without conditions. In other words, we never offered these things in exchange for information or good behavior. We wanted to send a message that we cared about their plight. Good intelligence and lawful behavior would come in time.

The third stage of our strategy was to "control the population." Galula states that the purpose of control "is to cut off, or at least reduce significantly, the contacts between the population and the guerrilla."[7] The 1-4 CAV accomplished this through a thorough and ongoing census, concrete barriers to control movement, a curfew, and a significant effort to fill the law enforcement gap.

We adopted a strategy from 2-12 Infantry called "close encounters" to complement our constant street presence. The strategy called for our Soldiers to approach each home in the neighborhood not only to determine who lived where, but also to build a real relationship with the population one family at a time. We found that while people would not talk to us on the streets, they would often speak freely inside their homes. Since we went to every home, no one felt singled out. Galula points out that a census

SFC Gannon Edgy and Captain Nick Cook of A Troop, 1-4 Cavalry talk to a Doura citizen through their interpreter during Operation Close Encounters.

can serve as a "basic source of intelligence."[8] We found that it was a tremendous source of intelligence that gave us an in-depth understanding of how people felt. We came to understand that AQI was supported only by a small minority of the population, and that most people desperately wanted things to improve. We discovered issues around which we could build an alliance based on a relationship of trust and respect. We could shape our talking points, information operations, and psychological operations to have the effect we wanted because we knew our target audience well.

Physical control of the population was important as well. A city-wide curfew was already in effect, and large concrete barriers had already begun to spring up around troubled neighborhoods. As our part of Doura was the insurgents' gateway into the entire neighborhood, we needed walls to disrupt his movement by forcing him to bring both men and material through our checkpoint. At the checkpoint, an insurgent was subject to an overt search as well as identification by unseen sources that observed him coming and going. The walls also protected our neighborhood from gunfire originating from surrounding areas. People could now start to move

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around without fear of being hit by stray gunfire. This increased security meant children could go back to school and businesses could open.

We also found it necessary to fill the law enforcement gap to maintain positive control of the population. As in any community, there were those who would steal, get into fights, have loud family arguments, speed, and commit any number of minor transgressions of the law. However, there was an overwhelming thirst for justice, and we did our best to ensure these issues were worked out by involving local leaders, including imams. Although we would never have real control over all lawless behavior, as reconciliation later took shape, we made efforts to involve the National Police (NP). Unfortunately, we found them to be more of a paramilitary organization than a true, civilian police force.

The fourth step, intelligence collection, started from the moment we began patrolling in Doura, but we were now in a position to get the type of almost daily quality intelligence that allowed us to actually detain insurgents for probable cause. Within five weeks of our implementation of a constant presence and "close encounters," we increased our pool of information sources from 0 to 36. In our first 30 days we detained only 16 people, but during our fourth month we detained 90 insurgents.

We often met people willing to meet with our tactical human intelligence teams who had actionable intelligence and had often worked in the intelligence field under the previous regime. We also used these encounters as an opportunity to show people the digital photos we used to identify insurgents. Since we were always on the street, insurgents grew numb to our presence and rarely attempted to escape. Our platoons would often have an intelligence source lead them to the home of an insurgent where Soldiers would simply knock on the door and detain him.

Galula tells us, "Intelligence is the principal source of information on guerrillas, and intelligence has to come from the population, but the population will not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken."[9] Providing increased security, detaining a number of key suspects, offering job opportunities, improving

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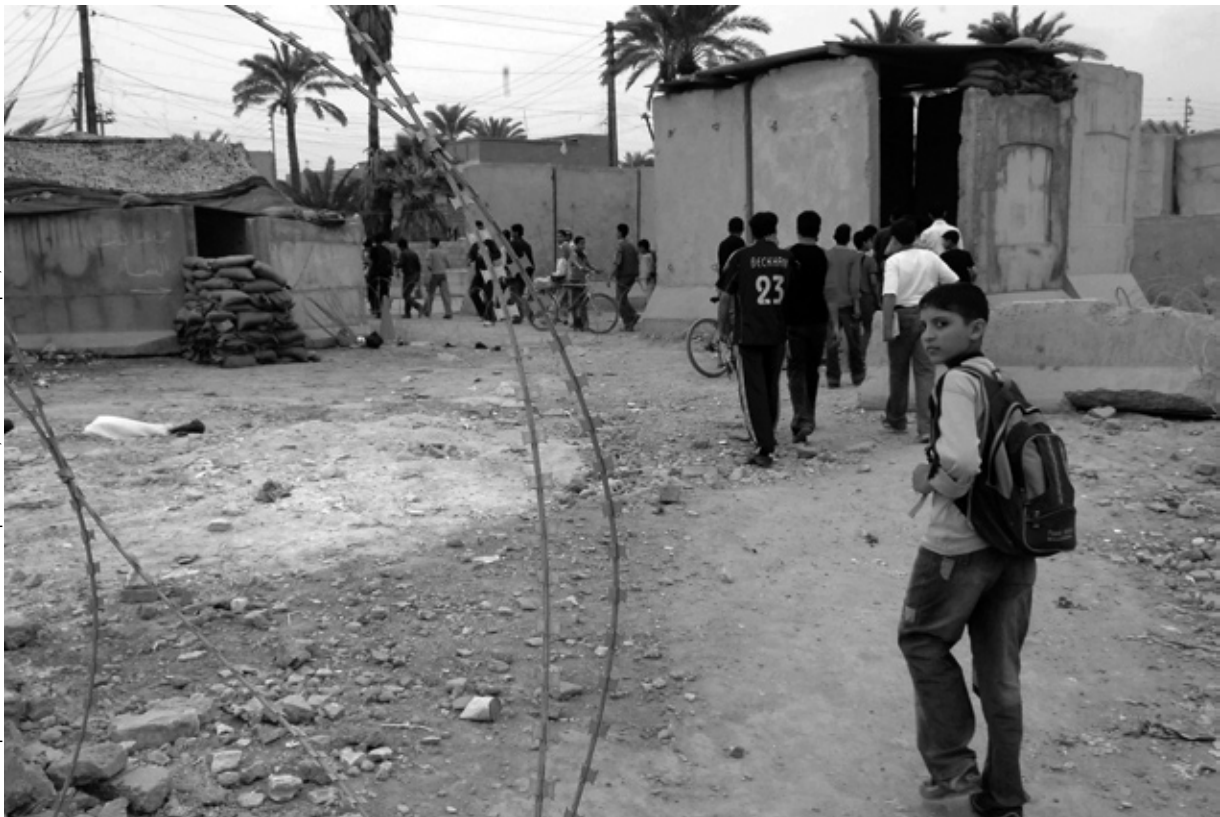
Children walking to school pass through an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Doura. Filtering the population through these checkpoints made it much more difficult for insurgents to move freely.

essential services, and building a personal bond between our Soldiers and the population resulted in enough quality intelligence to see the fifth and sixth step as outlined by Galula take shape—"to win the support of the population" and "purge the insurgent from the area."

Galula emphasizes the importance of involving the population in the long-term solution by recruiting local citizens for security purposes and conducting local elections to place "local leaders in positions of responsibility and power."[10] Coalition efforts to create and sustain the Sons of Iraq to openly assist with security efforts are well documented. Unlike in Anbar and other rural areas of Iraq, no single sheik in Baghdad could assemble so many disenfranchised Sunni men into a viable security force. Local leaders began to emerge—primarily from our well-established source networks—and they in turn helped organize the Sons of Iraq in Doura. While some may have been former insurgents, most were not, or at least they were not irreconcilables. Regardless, we took the lead in vetting each Sons of Iraq candidate, and when we found insurgents attempting to infiltrate the program, we detained them. If we had not done this, good citizens would have had no faith in this effort.

Once in uniform and openly providing security on the streets, the Sons of Iraq had a positive effect on the population. They were proud to be a part of the solution, and wanted to be seen as a legitimate organization. However, the National Police in the neighborhood were very suspicious of them. Even our most-capable NP captain stated, "It's my personal belief that before they were 'the Awakening' they were Al-Qaeda."[11] In order to fight against this perception, we worked to build relationships between the Sons of Iraq and NP leaders. I invited the former to attend our weekly security meeting with the National Police, which met with great success. We frequently patrolled with the NP battalion commander to inspect checkpoints, and we posted a number of Sons of Iraq at each NP checkpoint. This proved an effective interim tactic until the Sons of Iraq could be hired or otherwise dealt with effectively by the Iraqi government.

The only local government representation upon our arrival was the neighborhood and district advisory councils. These organizations did not exist prior to 2003, when the Coalition Provisional

A local leader from the Sons of Iraq walks the streets in Doura with a National Police battalion commander. The author can be seen between and behind them.

Authority established them to address local issues. Their leaders were elected in 2003 with no agreed-upon term of office. Most enjoyed the benefits of a relationship with coalition forces. We played to their egos, hoping to get positive results (whether tactical information or just neighborhood repairs), while they insisted on knowing the name of each contractor we hired, presumably to insist on a cut of the money or to provide us with a contractor of their own for the same reason. Even worse, this

> The unit has come to know the neighborhood in a way that would have been unthinkable just after the war, or even into 2004 and 2005. In fact, the U.S. military has never secured Iraq or controlled it so completely as it has today, and never before has their wealth of intelligence and ability to analyze it been better.
>
> —Daniel Pepper, *Time Magazine*
> 13 January 2008

organization had no budget. While better than nothing, it was essentially ineffective. We worked to replace the most unproductive representatives, but that was a challenge as well.

Early in 2008, the Iraqi government announced the formation of "tribal support councils." Specific guidance on the makeup of the councils and how many there would be was vague at best, but we seized upon this opportunity to hold some form of local elections. While we did not know how these new support councils would interact (if at all) with the neighborhood district councils, we did know that the council representatives would have opportunities to interface with Iraqi government officials.

Following Galula's dictums, we helped local leaders organize an election. Unfortunately, the Iraqi prime minister's office thought nothing of calling directly down to a NP brigade commander, giving him orders and expecting immediate results. So we essentially had two choices: actively assist with a free and fair election, or allow the Shi'a-dominated National Police to hold elections, which would almost certainly result in the selection of sectarian puppets. Galula states that one must "call for absolutely free elections for local provisional self-government, thus letting leaders emerge naturally from the population, which will feel more bound to them since they are the product of its choice."[12] We asked one of the primary non-political leaders in the area to put together a committee to help select a set of candidates and to work with the primary sheik in Doura to organize the election. Other than offering encouragement and security, we allowed the election to take place as they planned it.

Conclusion

In just over four months, using the "close encounters" strategy, and a constant presence, we forged a strong alliance with the local population, denying the insurgents the ability to operate effectively. In fact, 1-4 CAV was not attacked inside our area of operations in any way over the final six months of our time there. We detained 264 insurgents and transferred over 80 percent of them to prison. Twenty of those cases were tried in the Iraqi criminal court system. Parks and soccer fields replaced burning piles of trash, hundreds of stores reopened, and happy customers filled formerly empty streets. The National Police were at peace with Doura residents, while local leaders took office. Most important, this community inside Baghdad now had hope and an opportunity to move forward.

As our military continues to integrate the study and practice of counterinsurgency into our professional education system and combat training centers, David Galula's work should be required reading for all Soldiers and Marines of all ranks. A short book, it can be digested over a weekend and discussed comprehensively in a classroom environment or easily integrated into after-action discussions during training exercises.

U.S. Army, A/1-4 CAV

Before (May 2007) and After (March 2008): The main street in Doura is an example of the transformation that took place in Baghdad during the surge of 2007–2008.

In the future, it is likely that the U.S. will be involved in further counterinsurgency efforts or working to prevent new ones. The Army and Marine Corps must make every effort to preserve the institutional memory required to effectively prosecute counterinsurgency operations. While we will not always follow a prescribed set of steps to defeat an insurgency, it is imperative that we should embrace principles that have proven successful over time. Using Galula's theory to complement our doctrine in FM 3-24 will provide depth of understanding for leaders at all levels. *MR*

NOTES

1. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2004), 81.

2. Galula, 83.

3. The battalion concentrated on the most contested areas of Doura. Each platoon conducted an eight-hour patrol per day during six-consecutive days, before rotating off-shift duty for the next three days. This required shared operational battlespace. During limited visibility, one troop was dedicated to patrolling the assigned area of the remaining two troops. The Command Sergeant Major constantly checked leaders and Soldiers at all levels to ensure they did not reach a point where Soldiers burnt-out and became ineffective. After approximately five months at this pace, a staff sergeant stated that even the newest private in the platoon understood the need to be out patrolling Doura all of the time, After three days off-shift, platoon members were bored and ready to get back out patrolling among the population, especially as they grew close to them.

4. This was a situation analogous to two children fighting in the backseat of a car on a long trip. We knew that they had to get along at some point but, like fighting children, had to be separated for a cooling-down period. Well before we redeployed, we reinstituted joint patrols and integrated the Sons of Iraq into a comprehensive security effort only partially dependent upon 1-4 CAV.

5. Galula.

6. This contract employed over 300 men. Eventually, these employees served to collect intelligence on AQI movement and attempted IED emplacement. Once trash was removed, IED emplacement became much more challenging for the insurgent. Having trash collected regularly returned a small amount of dignity back to the population.

7. Galula., 82.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 50.

10. Ibid., 89.

11. Alissa Rubin, "In a Force for Iraqi Calm, Seeds of Conflict," *New York Times*, 23 December 2007.

12. Galula, 90.